

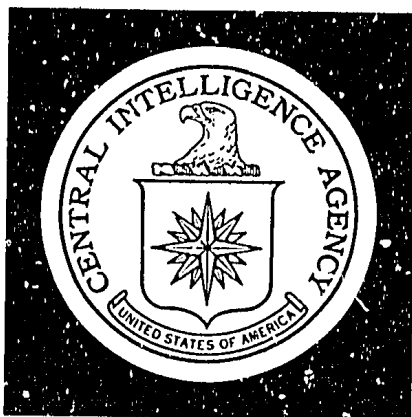
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OFFICE OF  
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

## MEMORANDUM

*The Russian Ouster--Causes and Consequences*

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22 August 1972

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# CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 August 1972

### MEMORANDUM\*

SUBJECT: The Russian Ouster -- Causes and Consequences

### NOTE

*Egypt's dramatic ouster of Soviet military personnel is an event of considerable ongoing consequence. There remain a number of uncertainties as to the circumstances surrounding it. This memorandum explores the topic primarily from the Egyptian angle. A subsequent memorandum, now in preparation, will examine it from Moscow's point of view.*

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\* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and discussed with other components of the CIA, who are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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## I. THE BOMBSHELL

1. On 17 July, Sadat announced the following decisions:

*"1. To terminate the mission of the Soviet military experts and advisers, who came at our request, as of 17 July, and to replace them with our sons in the Egyptian Armed Forces in all the tasks they used to carry out.*

*"2. All the military equipment and installations set up within Egyptian territory during the period following the aggression of June 1967 will be the sole property of the Arab Republic of Egypt and under the administration of its armed forces.*

*"3. To call, within the framework of the treaty of cooperation and friendship with the Soviet Union, for an Egyptian-Soviet meeting on a level to be agreed upon for consultations regarding the coming stage."*

Although Cairo had notified Moscow a few days previously, and the latter went along as gracefully as it could, the decision was unquestionably an Egyptian, not a joint one. This paper examines the reasons for the dramatic move, its meaning for Egyptian policy, and some implications for the US. Its time frame is the next six months to a year. Principal judgments are summed up in paragraph 23.

## II. THE REASONS

2. The causes of the Egyptian move are complex and interacting; some go back for years, others are more recent.

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The record shows substantial evidence of friction between Egyptian and Soviet military on both personal and professional levels. This friction, which seems to have grown markedly in the last year or two, was certainly a contributing cause, perhaps the precipitating one, but more fundamental matters were certainly involved.

3. The growth of Soviet forces stationed in Egypt, especially those operating for Soviet purposes, had become a grave affront to Egyptian national pride. Through much of the first half of this century, Egypt sought to rid itself of foreign military forces; British troops evacuated the Suez canal bases in 1956. After Egypt's crushing defeat in 1967, the USSR poured new arms into Egypt; it also introduced Soviet naval and air units into Egypt. By 1971 these forces, operating for Soviet purposes, had grown to 30 aircraft with ASW and reconnaissance missions, together with ships and shore-based naval personnel in three Egyptian ports. In addition, Soviet advisors were attached to Egyptian units down to battalion level. And, in response to Israeli air raids deep into Egyptian territory in 1970, Cairo had asked for and obtained Soviet air defense units.

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The total of Soviet military personnel peaked at more than 15,000. It must have been galling to Egyptian generals to have to lean so much on the Russians for help, and in all likelihood a substantial number of Russians patronized their Egyptian counterparts in ways that reminded the latter of British behavior of old.

4. Egypt for Egyptians -- not for other Arabs and certainly not for foreigners -- has been a theme of Sadat's presidency. In retrospect, it seems clear that Egyptians at large had grown weary of Nasser's pretensions to area leadership and of the burdens that Arab causes have imposed on their country. Sadat seems to sense this and has departed from Nasser's policies and style in many ways, domestic and international. He has catered to his people's desire to turn their attention inward; most would be happy to enjoy a spell of tending to their own affairs, if only something could be done about getting back Sinai.

5. Here, of course, Sadat has a problem. He and his generals know that Egypt cannot expect to regain any significant part of Sinai by military means. The Russians have refused to grant Egypt's requests for more and newer

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"offensive" weapons (just what the Egyptians wanted is unclear, but in all likelihood they were pressing for items which could take, or at least threaten to take, some toll of Israeli lives and property if new fighting broke out, since no amount of weaponry could convert the world's record holder for quick defeat into a military juggernaut). At least equally important for Cairo has been the fact that the Russians had shown no capacity to put pressure on the US to make Tel Aviv more forthcoming diplomatically and that the recent Moscow summit clearly showed the Russians' pre-occupation with wider interests. Both the US and Israel were on public record as believing that the Russian presence in Egypt was an obstacle to resolution of the Arab-Israeli problem. And Moscow was permitting an annual flow of 30,000 Jewish migrants to Israel.

6. Cairo's policy of relying on Moscow for effective help in its confrontation with Israel was manifestly not working. Evidence that the Egyptians were aware of the situation has accumulated over a period of months. But there was no easy alternative for Cairo; in effect, it selected what it saw as the least bad course of action. The Egyptian

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leaders could have no assurance that the results would be commensurate with the gamble. The move Sadat chose, however, has the merit of removing the mass of Soviets from Egypt, of reducing domestic political pressure, and of offering a potential break in the no-war-no-peace situation existing between Cairo and Tel Aviv.

*Why Mid-July?*

7. Four months before an American presidential election is not the most auspicious time to get Washington to encourage Israel to be more forthcoming in the modalities or the substance of a settlement. The Egyptians know this. If the ouster was based on Egyptian judgment that the "military option" against Israel was foreclosed and that Cairo should concentrate on the diplomatic one, mid-July seems singularly poor as the date to inaugurate such a policy. There are reports that Sadat's move was occasioned primarily by a final Soviet refusal to provide "offensive" arms or to permit Egypt to attack Israeli forces in Sinai. In view of the Egyptian leaders' realistic assessments of their forces' capabilities, we strongly doubt that this was

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the real reason or indeed that the Egyptians really wanted such weapons. For Sadat has used Soviet unwillingness to provide certain types of assistance as justification for Egypt's not initiating hostilities, which he wanted to avoid anyhow. Cairo's rationale of lack of "offensive" weapons is another case of Moscow being the scapegoat.

8. The compelling reason for the timing must be sought elsewhere. We lack sufficient data on Egyptian political dynamics in this post-Nasser era to judge whether Sadat had over-riding specific fears -- of a military move, of public outbursts, or of other domestic difficulties. It is very likely however, that Sadat felt under heavy pressure from several components of his constituency in Egypt. In the first place, he needed to repair the damage he had done to his status by inept explanations as to why Egypt hadn't gone to war in 1971. The attitude of the Egyptian military leaders may have been the decisive factor; we know that a number of them had become angry at Soviet attitudes and conduct and the good will and support of the military is a basic prop of the Cairo government. It is also noteworthy that a number of formerly prominent civilian politicians had circulated a letter criticizing his methods and Egypt's dependence

on the USSR and that there had been widespread discussion of Egyptian-Soviet relations in Egypt. The twentieth anniversary of the revolution of course provided a most appropriate time for dramatic affirmation of Egyptian national sovereignty and dignity.

9. Forceful action against the Soviets would also appeal in a special way to the segment of the population which Sadat represents and leans on -- the Egyptian middle and upper middle classes. It is to these groups, which provide Egypt's administrators, army officers (who rapidly assume bourgeois attitudes whatever their origins), business and professional people, that many of Sadat's social and economic measures have been directed. They have benefited from desequestrations of property, increased availability of luxuries, and a general easing of austerity. All things considered, it is clear that, with mounting frustration in the country, Sadat and his associates were pushed toward their big decision.

10. Sadat's move has undoubtedly relieved domestic pressures on him. He has taken the step his most important critics had demanded. He has shown his countrymen that he

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is as solicitous a defender of their dignity and independence as was Nasser. He will no doubt have to show in other ways, as time passes, that efforts to deal with Israel are at least in train. He is taking precautions by asking the national assembly to pass a law, restricting certain forms of political activity, which could be used in the future to cope with discontent. Over time, domestic dissatisfaction is likely to grow again to serious proportions, but the momentum provided by the ouster should carry him for several months at least.

## II. WHAT NOW?

11. The deed is done. The Russian military are leaving. We do not know precisely how far the exodus will go; indications are that relatively few will remain and that those who do will serve as trainers and instructors as Russians did before the exigencies of the post-'67 period required and permitted vast increases and as they presently do in, say, Syria and Algeria. What does this development mean for Egypt's foreign policy?

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*The USSR's Position*

12. The nature and extent of Soviet influence in Egypt will have to be worked out over time. Soviet counsels will have less effect than in the past. (Even then Moscow's words did not prevent Sadat from jailing Ali Sabri, supporting Numairi against the communists in the Sudan, or expelling the Russian military in a humiliating fashion.) Egypt has shown that it intends to manage its destiny. The Soviets are likely to insist on fairly strict compliance with the terms for debt repayments. As the source of all Egypt's armament, the USSR retains both political and economic leverage. The USSR has already reminded Egypt that it stands alone facing a powerful enemy by mentioning Israel's nuclear potential in the Moscow press. A total break with Moscow by Cairo would be very risky in terms of military unpreparedness, and Egypt almost certainly will not go this far. For while Cairo presently sees the likelihood of hostilities as slight, it knows that circumstances can change and it fears Israel's might. It appears that the Egyptians will let Soviet naval units continue to use some port facilities at Alexandria, Mersa Matruh, and Port Said, but these will

be restored to Egyptian control. Thus, anything smacking of extraterritorial privileges is probably lost to the Russians completely.

*The Confrontation with Israel*

13. The departure of Soviet missile crews, five squadrons of fighter aircraft and other air defense personnel sharply reduce Egypt's capability to defend itself against Israeli air attack. The Egyptians may have deluded themselves into believing that they can somehow get along without Soviet help in this area. But the evidence we have as to how the Egyptians view their own air performance in recent years leads to a firm judgment that Cairo knows full well that the Israelis are capable of inflicting substantial damage should they deem it necessary. The Egyptians have no capability to put forces across the canal and hold territory for more than a day or so in the face of Israeli opposition. (The Soviet pullout doesn't affect this low capability one way or another except as equipment maintenance standards may fall in time.) The chances of Egypt's initiating any major military action have become even smaller than they were before Sadat's 17 July

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announcement. Thus it is unlikely that there will be a cross-canal assault or a "war of attrition"; there will, perhaps be an occasional small probe or other incidents.

14. This leaves the Egyptians with the "diplomatic option" as the way to start on the road to getting back at least part of Sinai. Cairo has long believed that the US could get Israel to withdraw -- partially anyhow -- if it wanted to. Sadat doubtless believes that his ouster of the Russians should be viewed favorably by Washington; Egyptian officials have already said as much. Despite the cautiously uncontentious statements emanating from Tel Aviv, he will not expect action from there unless Washington interests itself. And he probably doesn't expect much along this line until the election is over.

15. Israel has reacted with caution to Sadat's move, but has hinted that it sees some element of promise in it. Premier Golda Meir spoke directly to Sadat in a speech on 26 July before the Knesset, saying that if the hour has really come, "Let us meet as equals and make a joint supreme effort to arrive at an agreed solution...", a safe statement, in view of Cairo's known opposition to direct talks. She did

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say that "interim steps such as the proposal of February 1971 regarding a special arrangement for the canal ...can (be) ... a temporary solution and a step toward peace...". This could be interpreted as a concession to the Egyptian view that any such special arrangement must be labelled as partial and not foreclose a final settlement restoring all of Sinai. Defense Minister Dayan has more recently spoken of dividing Sinai on either a temporary or permanent basis.

16. There are certainly some influential Israelis who will wish to make a serious effort to determine whether progress toward an agreement has become more feasible now. The general mood, in the government and among the public, however, appears pretty inflexible. Most Israelis see their country as strong and secure to a degree never before experienced as the consequence of resisting temptations to take risks in order to get a settlement after the 1967 war. They are firmly behind the policy of "creating facts" in the occupied areas and of insisting on direct negotiations without preconditions as the approach to a settlement. The Israeli economy is strong and growing. The country has received assurances of a continuing flow of essential weapons from the US. The pressures created by the Rogers initiative have ceased. There is less trouble on the borders than for

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years. The Arab states are disunited and weak. And, not the least in importance, the Soviet presence in Egypt has been greatly diminished and Soviet operational units withdrawn. It will be asked in Israel: What more could the country want? Is not our policy of firmness beginning to show results? Why upset so favorable a situation?

17. Prospects for advance in this sector are not good. Not long after the US elections are over, the Israelis will begin campaigning to choose a new Knesset -- not a time for a government seeking votes to be flexible on territory. There has been no abatement of the distrust which prevails between Egypt and Israel. The Israelis will wish to avoid any UN or four-power involvement to the extent possible. Israel will continue to try to reduce Egypt's options to the single one of direct negotiation.

*For the US*

18. The Egyptians have already hinted that Sadat's initiative in cutting down the Russian presence should be viewed favorably by the US. And the action is consistent with others taken over the past year or so -- Cairo's stated willingness to sign a peace agreement with Israel

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in response to Jarring, its favorable response to the Rogers initiative, and its tacit acknowledgement by so responding that the US, not the USSR, held the keys to a Middle East settlement. There are suggestions here that post-Nasser Egypt, in addition to paying less attention to pan-Arab matters and to liberalizing the domestic economy, is moving away from the over-close association with Russia, which developed after the June 1967 war, toward a more genuine non-aligned posture. Cairo will want the US to recognize this move and is likely to be very unhappy if the US does not use it as an opportunity to move the Israelis.

19. The Egyptians don't expect miracles from the US. Their attitude is one of realistic cynicism; they have been disappointed at US failure to live up to their expectations before. They hope the US will do something about Israel, believing that only the US can. They will be disappointed if they see no results. (Despite Sadat's threats of a "hot autumn" for the US if the latter doesn't swing into action, he probably expects no more than an earnest of US intentions in the next few months.) With Russian presence and influence so diminished in Egypt, the latter will at some point feel

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the need for an additional -- or substitute -- scapegoat, and the US is likely to fill this role. If, after what they regard as a suitable time, nothing happens, Cairo will consider actions against US interests in the area.

20. None of the courses open to Egypt seems promising. Sadat could try to get the oil producing Arab states to curtail shipments of oil produced by American companies. He is not likely to get a favorable response from any except Qadhafi in the near term. Saudi Arabia is already involved in discussions on behalf of several states with oil companies on the issue of participation and Feisal has stated he will not use a threat to cut off oil supplies as a political weapon. Getting Saudi Arabia and other producers, such as Kuwait and Iraq, to sacrifice for the common cause appears highly unlikely. A renewal of hostilities would raise the chances of such cooperation, but Egypt clearly neither wants nor expects major fighting. The price of warfare would be very high and the desire for it is clearly not widespread in Egypt. Despite all the rhetoric about reconquering Sinai, at any given moment over the next

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year at least the arguments in Cairo favoring postponement are likely to outweigh those favoring initiating military action.

21. Nor is Egypt likely to feel strong pressure from other Arab states. Sadat's move has been welcomed by most of them. Syria's Asad is quietly approving; he has consistently resisted pressure to sign a treaty with Moscow, and no Soviet military forces have been based in Syria. King Feisal, staunchly anti-communist, approves; so does Qadhafi, who will probably pay a lot of Egypt's bills to the USSR in return for the just-agreed "total unification" of his country with Egypt. Tunisia and Morocco also approve while Iraq and South Yemen are doubtless annoyed, but their several views count for little in Cairo.

*For Europe*

22. Egypt is not merely waiting for the US, however. It is continuing and broadening the process of better relations with Western Europe begun some years ago. European firms are going to finance the \$200 million oil pipeline which is to be built from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean. Cairo sees France and, to a lesser extent, the UK

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"on its side" in the four-power talks on the Arab-Israeli issue. Cairo has already begun diplomatic moves designed to get European support for some new peace initiative. Egypt has sounded out the UK about purchasing arms. It has just resumed relations with West Germany. Sadat is going to visit West Europe within the next year. We expect that this improvement in relations will continue, that Cairo will hope to use the better ties as a way of getting European countries to persuade the US in turn to persuade the Israelis to be more forthcoming in matters relating to a settlement.

*Summing Up*

23. The principal conclusions which can be drawn at this time from Cairo's ouster of the Russians are:

(a) Resentment of Soviet forces in Egypt, recognition that the USSR was unwilling to support political efforts to regain Sinai, and a variety of domestic pressures occasioned Sadat's step.

(b) A suggestion that post-Nasser Egypt is moving away from the over-close association with Russia, which developed after the June 1967 war, toward a more genuine non-aligned posture, including better relations with Western Europe.

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(c) Egypt intends to concentrate on the "diplomatic" option and not to use military force against the Israelis in Sinai and has no expectation of an immediate Israeli attack.

(d) Egypt hopes that the US will respond favorably and persuade Israel to be more forthcoming on the issue of a settlement. It has no great expectations, but sees no other force able to move the Israelis. It will seek to compel the US to so act, but has little capability to do so. It will, however, blame the US if progress is not achieved.

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